

A NOTE ON THE RECENT EXPERIMENTS WITH RUDI SCHNEIDER

BY LORD CHARLES HOPE

I HAVE read with much interest the report written by Mr. Th. Besterman and Mr O. Gatty on their recent experiments with the medium Rudi Schneider (*Proc. S.P.R.*, xlii.) and their letter to *Nature*, 14th April, 1934.

Having attended a large number of sittings held with this medium during each of his five visits to London, I feel that a few comments from me would not come amiss and might be of interest to those readers of the *Proceedings* who are interested in the question of the present position of the Rudi Schneider mediumship. The series of sittings were all held in London, April 1929 ; Oct. 1929 to Jan. 1930 ; Feb. 1932 to May 1932 ; Oct. to Dec. 1932 ; Oct. 1933 to April 1934. The first three series were held at the National Laboratory of Psychical Research under the direction of Mr Harry Price,¹ the fourth was arranged privately by me and some friends of mine (*Proc. S.P.R.*, xli.) ; the fifth being his recent visit to the S.P.R.

While in no way wishing to criticise the patient and conscientious experiments conducted by Messrs. Besterman and Gatty during the recent sittings with Rudi Schneider, I consider that there are several points raised by this report and by their letter to *Nature* (14th April), which should be elucidated ; otherwise, I fear, such readers as have not closely followed the whole case and read the reports issued after former series of sittings might, inadvertently, be misled as to the sum total of available evidence for the production of paranormal phenomena by this medium.

Firstly, while it is nowhere stated in the Besterman-Gatty report that these experiments with infra-red light apparatus disprove the results reported by Dr Osty (" Les Pouvoirs Inconnus de l'Esprit sur la Matière, by E. and M. Osty), or those reported by Mr Herbert (*Proc. S.P.R.*, xli.), it is possible that some readers might come to that conclusion.

It should be noted that absorptions of an infra-red light beam have been reported only at those series of sittings in which the telekinetic phenomena noted have at times been of considerable range

¹ Harry Price, *Rudi Schneider*.

Bulletin IV. " An Account of Further Experiments with Rudi Schneider ", by Harry Price.

Lord Charles Hope, and others, *Proc. S.P.R.*, xli.

and frequency. In other words, although at sittings when absorptions have been noted there have often been no other phenomena, yet the two kinds of phenomena have alternated at fairly frequent intervals and on many occasions both kinds of phenomena have been reported as happening at the same sitting.

It is true that at only seven out of the seventy-seven sittings, conducted by Dr Osty in 1931, were any telekinetic phenomena noted (whereas at the majority of the sittings absorptions were observed), but it must be remembered that Dr Osty, for the greater part of his experiments, concentrated on trying to obtain absorptions of infra-red beams rather than telekinetic movement of material objects. Also, it is worth noting that during the majority of sittings Dr Osty dispensed with the usual "cabinet", and so the movement of the curtains, which is much the most frequent and nearly always the initial telekinetic phenomenon with this medium, was rendered impossible.

It would seem to be a significant fact that at both those series of sittings at which no absorptions were reported (see Th. Besterman's report, *Proc. S.P.R.*, xl. 428-436, on sittings in Paris, Feb.-March 1933, and the recent S.P.R. sittings, *Proc. S.P.R.*, xlii.), no telekinetic movements of any importance were observed either. This would seem to show that although it may be, as conjectured by Dr Osty, usually easier for the medium to effect with his "force" an absorption of an infra-red beam rather than to move a material object by telekinetic means, yet when telekinetic movements are absent from many consecutive sittings there is no reason either to expect absorptions.

Unfortunately, with the possible exception of some small curtain movements and some rather indefinite "touches", no phenomenon of any kind was reported during the recent series of sittings at the S.P.R.

In Messrs. Besterman and Gatty's letter to *Nature*, and also in their full Report in *Proceedings*, the point is somewhat stressed that small curtain movements, such as had already been noted from time to time, continued after a "check" apparatus had been devised which registered nothing paranormal. "In order to determine", runs this letter, "whether these (movements of curtains) were due to draughts, a strip of tinfoil about a foot in length was so hung about 5 mm. from a vertical metal plate that a slight draught brought them into contact and rang an electric bell. The whole was so placed that the 'force' had ready access to it and that draughts could not affect it. Under these conditions the bell did not ring, though the curtain continued to move."

It seems to be quite probable that these small curtain movements were indeed caused by draughts. It was not, however, made clear in the above letter or, I consider, in the full Report, that the "force",

to effect the desired contact, would first have had to get behind the curtains, enter a circular hole of 3" diameter in the lead box, and then turn at right-angles and advance about 8" before impinging on the tinfoil which was only about 4" in width.

It has frequently been noticed at former series of sittings with Rudi, when really impressive phenomena have occurred, that it has, almost without exception, been at the sittings at which the phenomena have been both frequent and varied that any degree of delicacy of aim or accomplishment has been achieved by "Olga". To move a curtain even violently indicates no very great sense of direction. To pick up objects, tie knots in handkerchiefs, touch sitters with the edge of a curtain after a warning to that effect has been already given by "Olga" and occasionally to place small objects into or take them away from the hands of sitters, does need a very considerable accuracy of aim and control of the "force".

The alternative theory, that when such movements have been noted they have been achieved by means of the medium freeing a hand or foot, must of course be duly considered, but those who have had the experience of controlling this medium while successful sittings have been held are almost unanimous in thinking that theory untenable owing to the variety and continuity of the phenomena observed while the controllers were satisfied the control of the medium was perfect.

Although to effect the desired contact in Mr Gatty's above-mentioned apparatus might have required even less strength than to move the curtains ever so slightly, yet it would certainly have needed a much more complicated use of the "force".

In their letter to *Nature*, Messrs. Besterman and Gatty say, "It has been alleged that the trance personality is aware of what goes on in the dark *séance*-room; in these sittings this was not found to be the case." In their full Report (*Proc. S.P.R.*, xlii.) they give details of unsuccessful attempts made by "Olga" to describe the position of a sitter's hand. This might be read as constituting a refutation of the observations made by sitters at previous series of sittings, whereas in point of fact no such disproof was obtained. Personally I have always doubted the supposed ability of "Olga" to "see" in the dark what the sitters are doing, although I think "she" has shown, on occasions, a certain hypersensitiveness of hearing and awareness to any unheralded experiment on the part of any of the sitters. But it is true that during the more successful sittings at which I have been present "Olga" has on several occasions displayed a very accurate idea of where such objects as have been seen or heard by the sitters to move during the sitting would be found when the white light was turned on at the end.

The red light used at the sittings was usually too faint and too restricted in its area of illumination to explain how this could have

been achieved by "Olga", but a careful record of "Olga's" successes and failures in that direction would have to be kept over a long series of successful sittings before any conclusion could be come to. The experiment done in conjunction with Dr C. G. Douglas of Oxford, described in the Report and also in the letter to *Nature*, in connection with the fast trance breathing hitherto so much commented on, is of great interest. If this single experiment can be relied on, and no doubt it was carried out with care, and we are assured the breathing of the medium while undergoing the tests was typical of his trance breathing during ordinary sittings, then it would certainly seem to disprove the result of Dr Osty's experiment ("Les Pouvoirs Inconnus de l'Esprit sur la Matière, p. 117) done by means of external measurements of the medium's chest while the trance breathing was in progress. Dr Osty's experiment had seemed to show that the volume of air breathed by the medium in trance was greatly above the normal.

The medium's brother, Willi Schneider, also a noted medium, when he was in a similar trance state, is said to have breathed in almost as rapid a manner as Rudi. This rapid breathing of the Schneider brothers has been held to be unique among physical mediums, and the discovery that Rudi after all only inhales about a normal amount of air into his lungs, brings their case more into line with other impressive cases of physical mediumship, and supports the theory that the fast breathing is an acquired habit and is not really necessary for the production of paranormal phenomena. Both authors of the Report claim to have duplicated Rudi's fast breathing for considerable periods of time. I myself heard Mr Gatty do a successful imitation of Rudi's trance breathing for over half an hour at a time during a sitting; an excellent method of comparison although one, perhaps, unlikely to appeal to "Olga's" sense of uniqueness.

The result of the word-association and psychogalvanic reflex tests with Rudi and "Olga" is of great interest and will strengthen the opinion of those observers of the mediumship (and they form a majority) who had already come to the conclusion that "Olga" is a secondary personality of the medium's. It is indeed unfortunate that so much careful work and such a large financial outlay should have gone unrewarded by conclusive results as to the chief phenomena associated with this mediumship, and disappointing to all concerned that Messrs. Besterman and Gatty, after all their trouble, should not have had an opportunity of judging of the value of the phenomena in question such as a single good sitting would have given them.

At the end of March 1934, thinking it would be of considerable interest from a psychological point of view if the medium were asked to sit in a room in which he had previously produced impressive

phenomena (in 1929 and in Nov.-Dec. 1932), and to restrict the sitters as much as possible to those in whose presence he had given really successful sittings, I invited Rudi to stay on in London for an extra fortnight after completing his visit to the S.P.R. As phenomena were observed at the second and third of these extra sittings, he eventually remained for three weeks, and gave in all seven sittings from April 4th to 20th. No apparatus to detect the presence of the "force" was employed, as there was not sufficient time in which to arrange this, and in any case the medium appears to think that when his "force" is weak the use of such apparatus tends to inhibit his powers.

Owing to illness I was myself only able to attend the first sitting, which was a blank. Fortunately, however, among the sitters who attended most of these sittings were Professor A. F. C. Pollard, Professor D. F. Fraser-Harris, Mr C. C. L. Gregory and Captain the Hon. Victor Cochrane-Baillie, all of whom had had considerable experience with the medium during at least two of his former successful series of sittings, and the last named had also attended a large number of the S.P.R. series of sittings.

Out of the seven sittings held, four at least were positive (at a fifth one a sitter thought there had been a small movement of the curtain, but this was not corroborated by the other sitters and therefore was discounted). The phenomena observed consisted chiefly of movements of the cabinet curtain, which was not hung with such delicate adjustment as those at the S.P.R. had been, and therefore required more "force" to move them. While these movements were at no time as large as have been reported at former sittings, they were large enough on occasions to be seen by all the sitters and the small bells attached to one curtain were fairly frequently heard to ring.

The sixth sitting was the best, and the movements of the curtains were quite frequent and considerable. Mr Gregory was asked by "Olga" to hold a waste-paper basket near to the centre of the two curtains. Accordingly, keeping contact with his neighbours, he balanced the basket on his hands. He felt several tugs on the end of the basket nearest to the curtains and eventually it was pulled off his hand on to the floor.

A technique, new as far as I know, was developed by "Olga" at these sittings. At the first sitting I was asked to hold the centre edge of the curtain nearest to the medium. I was subsequently asked by "Olga" if I could feel "her" pulling at it. I did not feel anything, but at later sittings Professor Fraser-Harris, Mr Gregory and Mr C. W. Fisk all had the experience of feeling the curtain tugged and when held somewhat lightly it was several times pulled out of the sitter's hand.

While in no way equal in variety or strength to the phenomena

displayed at earlier sittings in 1929 and 1932, the result of these extra sittings tend to show that Rudi Schneider has not lost his power of producing paranormal phenomena, and it is to be hoped that either in Austria or elsewhere it will be found possible to continue to experiment with him and see if the reported absorptions of infra-red light beams can be repeated and more closely examined and the production of telekinetic phenomena proved to the satisfaction of all.

A Comment on the above Note by Mr Oliver Gatty

I HAVE read with great interest Lord Charles Hope's "Note on the recent experiments with Rudi Schneider," and am very grateful to him for elucidating a number of potential misunderstandings.

The report on the recent investigations of Rudi Schneider at the Society for Psychical Research was confined almost exclusively to facts observed during those sittings, both for the sake of brevity and in the interest of impartiality. If this has led to any misunderstandings, I should like to apologise.

Lord Charles Hope raises the question as to the accuracy of the single experiment carried out on the respiration of the medium in trance. Four samples were taken and also one of the medium in a normal resting state. All five sets gave figures of substantially the same order of magnitude, and this may be said to be a sort of check on the figures. Further, the values for the respiratory coefficient depend only on the composition and not on the bulk of the exhaled gases. Thus the possibility of error due to leakage of the valves at high speeds is not likely seriously to affect the conclusions drawn (see *Proc. S.P.R.*, xlii. p. 261) from the data. The method of measuring total exhaled gases in a Douglas bag is superior to measurements of chest expansion (used by Dr Osty), since it also includes the respiration due to movements of the diaphragm. It therefore seems safe to conclude that there is nothing necessarily paranormal in the breathing of the medium, as it was also found possible to reproduce it at will.